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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Radio Service

OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Thursday, November 3, 1938.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "WHY WOMEN ARE INTERESTED IN COMMUNITY FORESTS." Information from the Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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If you have never considered the subject of forestry among a housewife's interests, let me ask you some questions? How large is your local tax bill? How much unemployment is cared for out of taxes? Would you be interested in a community project that might reduce both taxes and unemployment? Do the women in your locality get together behind desirable plans that benefit the whole community?

Believe it or not, there are communities in Europe where citizens receive a bonus check instead of a local tax bill!

How does it happen? Such communities own small local forests which are operated for profit. When there are unemployed men in the community, there is paid work for them in the forest. Finland obtains several million dollars from the operation of its community forests. In Germany there are several hundred towns where the residents receive dividends from the town forests instead of paying local taxes. At least two-thirds of the forest lands in Switzerland, and about half the forests in Bulgaria, are owned by communities. The average net profit from these forests is reported at about $5 an acre annually, but some of them earn much more. The famous Sihlwald belonging to the city of Zurich brings a net return of $12 an acre per year on 4,000 acres, or $48,000, to the city. It employs one man regularly for every 33 acres, and additional labor during the season as needed.

I have just learned from the Forest Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture that we have more than a thousand community forests in America. None of them has been operated as long and few of them as intensively as those abroad, so the profits may not result in bonus checks, but the benefits from most of our community forests are already very real and they are mounting slowly year by year. Our American community-owned forests are often started to protect a watershed. This is a valuable use in itself. But at the same time they grow merchantable timber.

Work in the forest provides both emergency and steady employment. Part of the supply of timber may be the raw material for some local wood-working industry, giving permanent, regular work to people in the community. This keeps earned money at home and lowers relief rolls. Timber that cannot be sold for lumber may be sold for firewood, or even given to needy citizens. But when the timber is sold outside of the community it brings money to the community. In some cases it may be possible to lessen taxes.

Of course the recreational uses of the community forest are many. They include much more than out-of-doors fun for the local population and increased wild life. In many cases they attract people who also spend money in the nearby

community. Take the village of Stowe, Vermont, which is close to a popular ski-run on Mt. Mansfield. As many as 3,000 visitors in a single week-end have been cared for in this little village of 700 persons. Incidentally, Stowe has a small 100-acre forest of its own, from which maple cord-wood is sold. And the town has a little wood-working factory which produces wooden articles for sale that are known all over New England.

Let me tell you about some of the other thriving community forests we have. Another Vermont forest of 3,500 acres is owned by the city of Rutland. Over 66,000 trees have been planted here, and during the hard winter of 1931-32 the city employed about 40 men daily on forest work. The employment was staggered so that as many as possible had jobs for a few days each week. These men thinned, pruned, and cut fire lines, adding constantly to the value of the forest property.

One of the oldest community forests is a little 77 acre tract in the town of Danville, New Hampshire. This was established about 1760, under the guardianship of a parsonage committee. The returns have been used for the support of the minister and the parish.

Newington, New Hampshire, has a town forest of 112 acres from which $6,000 worth of timber has been sold in the last 50 years. The boards of selectmen which have managed the forest have given fuel to the poor, and allowed citizens to cut wood for winter use. Timber sales have helped pay for a library, a water system in the town building, a drinking fountain at the square, and a new school house.

The village of Petersham, Massachusetts, owned a poor farm of 99 acres. The almshouse was closed in 1904 and the farm was almost forgotten until someone thought of selling it. It was then discovered that a great part of the farm was covered with well-grown northern white pine. The merchantable timber on 13 acres alone was worth $5,200. The tract was held as a town forest, and is now operated according to the advice of the previous director of the Harvard Forest.

California has about 150 community forests, and many examples could be cited of forests in other states. Women's organizations are interesting themselves in the benefits of a piece of community woodland, and so, perhaps, can the one you belong to. The P.T.A., the D.A.R., the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the Women's Auxiliary of the American Legion, the Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, girls' 4-H clubs, and Y.W.C.A. are some of the groups that can do much to promote local interest in starting a community forest. They can support forestry measures in the state legislatures, encourage the teaching of forestry and appreciation of nature in the public schools, and get back of the state educational authorities in these fields of teaching.

Sometimes the necessary land has been set aside from the original land grant. Sometimes it has been purchased or donated. Some of the land is acquired through tax reversion. However obtained, such lands if wisely managed hold promise of providing work for the rapidly increasing group of unskilled, unemployed men over 45, and thereby reducing local taxes levied for their maintenance on relief.

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